DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 238 870 SP 023 642

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TITLE Standards for Elementary Teacher Certification: A Fifty State Study.
PUB DATE [83]
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Education; Accrediting Agencies; Education Courses; Elementary Education; *Elementary School Teachers; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; Required Courses; State Departments of Education; *State Standards; *Teacher Certification; *Teacher Education; Teacher Education Curriculum; Teacher Education Programs

ABSTRACT

A study of the minimum program standards established by 50 state education agencies for preparation and certification of elementary school teachers focused on the status of general education requirements, professional education requirements, and requirements for areas of concentration. Two reference points were employed in analysis of the resulting data: the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) standards of quality in the certification of teachers and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards for the preparation of teachers for certification. Data are presented in terms of the minimum semester hours in general and professional education and areas of concentration required by state departments of education. Data revealed a wide diversity nationally as to which major component (general vs professional education) is likely to contribute to the development of an excellent elementary school teacher. The most notable weaknesses of state standards in relation to the guidelines set by NASDTEC and NCATE fell within the professional education component. The central dilemma for teacher education institutions and state education agencies was seen as arriving at the proper balance between professional training and general education or liberal arts. (JD)

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STANDARDS FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHER CERTIFICATION:

A Fifty State Study

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STANDARDS FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHER CERTIFICATION

A Fifty State Study

The final report of the Commission on Excellence in Education has joined the chorus of criticism of American schools, and both directly and by inference, programs and standards for teacher preparation. The Commission concludes that too many teacher candidates today are being drawn from among the least able high school graduates. Furthermore, says the report, elementary teachers in particular are then prepared for certification by programs heavily weighted toward "educational methods" at the expense of courses in subjects to be taught (Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). Popular criticism of teacher preparation and certification range from the Commission's concerns to complaints that too many candidates lack the very basic skills they are charged with teaching (Benderson, 1982) and that they are too frequently unable to maintain an orderly and disciplined learning environment (Gallup, 1982).

A recent national poll conducted for Newsweek (Williams et al., April 20, 1981) found that 59% of the respondents felt that teachers must be better trained. A later item in the same series (Williams, et al., April 27, 1981) further inferred that "some states have more requirements for getting a driver's license than for teaching." All of these charges have apparently been made on the basis of limited and random information about state standards for the preparation and certification of teachers. Hall and Hord in their "National Agenda for Research in Teacher Education" (1981) have, in fact, identified as one of eight top priority research issues the need for more accurate data about what constitutes teacher education nationally.

PROBLEM AND METHOD

The purpose of this study was to determine the minimum program standards established by the fifty state education agencies for preparation and certification of elementary school teachers. The study was limited to standards for the granting of comprehensive elementary certification, variously defined by states as K-6, K-8, 1-6, and 1-8. Two states, Virginia and North Carolina, grant only early childhood and middle school certification, and, therefore, were not further considered. Several other states, all in the southeast, would appear to be moving in the direction of Virginia and North Carolina, while continuing for the present to grant comprehensive certification.

The specific goals were to identify the status of: 1) general education requirements, 2) professional education requirements, and 3) any requirements for a third program component called "majors," "areas of concentration," "areas of emphasis," etc.

Many states, of course, make additional non-programmatic requirements for certification such as demonstration of basic skills competence, affadavits of moral character, citizenship, fingerpringing in California, etc., but these results were recently reported for secondary teachers and in most cases, standards are essentially the same for elementary certification (Weible and Dumas, 1982).

The data collection occurred during the fall of 1982. The fifty directors of state divisions for the certification of teachers were requested by letter to provide all current policies and guidelines related to the certification of elementary teachers. Forty-six responded as requested. The remaining four directors were contacted by telephone, and the request was repeated. Materials from these four states were quickly received.

All documents were thoroughly read by both authors and information relevant to the study was recorded according to preconceived categories. It was necessary to modify the preconception in one instance when it was discovered that several states require a component, distinct from both general education and professional education, requiring adapted courses for elementary teachers in one or more of the arts and sciences.

Many of the certification documents required interpretive judgements by the authors as to precisely what was being expected, due to the practice in some states of laying out requirements in grandly but vaguely stated principles regarding either the desired characteristics of a teacher education program or the products of such a program. This is especially true of those states which now list their standards in the form of expected competencies of candidates for certification, as opposed to the more conventional listing of types of courses required and minimum credit expectations. There were instances where interpretation of documents reached such a level of difficulty that it was necessary to contact state certification officials by telephone for clarification.

There are two important reference points employed in the analysis of the data which follows. The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) maintains a current statement of recommendations for teacher certification (1981), and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) maintains similar guidelines for teacher education programs (1981). NASDTEC standards constitute the national benchmark for acceptable standards of quality in the certification of teachers, just as NCATE provides that same benchmark for the preparation of teachers for certification.

RESULTS

It must be noted first that with regard to all three of the components of teacher certification programs with which this study was concerned, general education, professional education, and "areas of concentration" or "majors," there are states which do not make any specific requirements. Explanations for such exclusions are many. The most frequent one is that many states operate a system whereby state education agency committees visit teacher education institutions and negotiate the conditions for approval of their programs. All of these states, except Hawaii and Alaska, have some explicit program guidelines, but often these are limited to a very few top priority concerns, to requirements with legal mandates, or in several cases to broad descriptive characteristics of the desired graduates of programs. In other cases, particularly with general education, state agencies sometimes leave judgments entirely to teacher education institutions or require work within a wide range of options (i.e., 40 semester hours of general education to be elected from among history, English, science, mathematics, or fine arts).

For consistency, data have been presented in terms of semester-credit hours, though in some states minimums are stated as percentages of the baccalaureate program. For example, where the general education component must constitute 30% of the total program, this has been interpreted as 36 semester hours of a 120-hour degree program.

General Education

Thirty states currently maintain an overall minimum requirement for work in the general education component for elementary certification. The range in semester-credit-hours is a remarkable 24-82, and the mean is 51.5 hours, 43% of a minimal baccalaureate degree program.

Data on general education requirements by discipline are presented in Table 1. Standards by the states tend to be presented in two forms. Twenty states make explicit semester-credit-hour requirements for some disciplines, while 14 additional states make no specifications of the quantity of work expected, but do require some course work or demonstration of competency. Table 1 includes both of these approaches.

It will be observed that history/social sciences is the predominent component of general education programs. This seems clearly to result from a tendency for American history and/or government to be mandated by legislatures or state boards for civic education purposes. Oral communication and health/physical education rank lowest, being required by about half the states which make such specifications, despite NASDTEC's recommendations that work in both be included in certification programs.

A complication in interpreting the above data is that several states, distinct from their general education standards, require course work in one or more of these disciplines especially adapted for elementary teachers. Seven states require one substantive course in both art and music adapted in this fashion, while six states require 3-6 hours of adapted mathematics, and lesser numbers of states require such an adapted course in English, social studies, health/physical education, or nutrition. Therefore, the data previously presented regarding general education needs to be perceived as adjusted upward to some extent, especially with fine arts and mathematics. A precise adjustment of the previously presented data is probably not possible since it seems likely from the wording of various state guidelines that, despite the separation of these requirements from the general education component, some program or certification applicants may be allowed to meet general education and adapted course requirements with the same courses.

Table 1: Minimum General Education Requirements of the States by Discipline

Discipline*	Semester Credit Hours Required			Coursework or Competency Required n=34**	
	f*	Mean	Range	f***	%
History/Social Science	20	9.8	2-18	34	100
English/Composition	16	8.6	2-15	28	82
Science	14	8.0	3-15	30	88
Mathematics	14	5.1	3-8	27	79
Fine Arts/Humanities	12	7.3	3-18	25	71
Oral Communication	8	2.8	2-3	17	50
Health/Physical Education	9	3.4	2-8	16	47

*Single states require work in Behavioral Science, Library Science, Manual Arts, and Indian Studies.

**Remaining states make no specifications by discipline. Frequencies incorporate those states requiring a minimum number of semester credit hours.

***Frequency refers to the number of states specifying such a requirement.

Professional Education

Thirty-seven states specify a minimum semester-hour requirement for the total professional education component. The mean requirement is 29.3 semester hours and the range is 16 to 72 semester hours. As with the general education component, the national mean is less remarkable than the extraordinary range among the states, suggesting substantial variation in the perceived value of the professional sequence in the training of elementary teachers.

Professional requirements by area or topic are presented in Table 2. As was true with general education, many states choose to specify a minimum semester-hour expectation for particular types of courses and field experiences, while others require some amount of coursework or competency demonstration by area. It will be noted that 46 states make some explicit requirements within this component. The four exceptions are Hawaii and Alaska which, again, depend entirely upon program approval procedures, and Virginia and North Carolina which do not grant comprehensive elementary certificates. It should also be understood, however, that several other program approval states list expectations in the form of desired teacher competencies or outcomes rather than in terms of courses or work required. These generally have direct implications for coursework or types of training, but no clear implication for field experience or student teaching. This essentially explains the 89% requirement of student teaching. The authors confidently assume that no teacher education program would be approved without some form of supervised teaching experience, but the fact remains that some certification documents neither state nor imply it. Another necessary qualification of the student teaching requirement is that several states require substantially more time to be spent in student teaching than their semester-hour requirement would

Table 2: Minimum Professional Education Requirements by Area

Area	Semester Credit Hours Required			Coursework or Competency Required n=46*	
	f**	Mean	Range	f**	%
Educational Psychology/ Growth & Development	10	4.4	2-6	38	83
Educational Media/ Technology	0	-	-	10	22
Educational Measurement	1	3.0	-	11	24
General Curriculum/Methods/ Materials	4	3.5	2-6	27	59
Social Foundations	7	3.1	2-6	23	50
Classroom Management/ Discipline	0	-	-	8	17
School Organization/ Administration	0	-	-	5	11
Multi-Cultural/Human Relations	1	2.0	-	8	17
Exceptional Child/Mainstreaming	8	2.6	2-3	17	37
Early Field Experiences	1	2.0	-	10	22
Community/Parent Relations	0	-	-	7	15
Teaching of Reading	21	4.8	2-9	41	89
Teaching of Math	6	2.7	2-3	20	43
Teaching of Science	3	2.7	2-3	18	39
Teaching of Art	2	3.0	-	14	30
Teaching of Music	2	3.0	-	12	26
Teaching of Health/ Physical Education	1	2.0	-	21	46
Teaching of English	4	2.5	2-3	20	43
Teaching of Social Studies	2	2.5	2-3	17	37
Children's Literature	7	2.9	2-3	20	43
Student Teaching	20	6.2	2-3	41	89

*46 states make at least one substantive requirement under professional education.

**Frequency refers to the number of states specifying such a requirement.

Note: Four states or less require work in the following: An Introduction to Elementary Education, Professionalism, Legal Aspects of Education, Career Development, Consumer Education, Computer Technology, and Teaching of Drama.

generally imply. Typically, a semester-credit hour would suggest approximately 30 hours in a classroom. The 6.2 semester-hour national mean is accurate for credits, but the mean amount of time actually required nationally in supervised teaching is somewhat greater than the 186 hours which might otherwise be assumed.

With those understandings, Table 2 correctly presents the relative value which the states place on each aspect of a teacher education sequence, beginning with the nearly universal specifications of student teaching, instruction in the teaching of reading, and educational psychology or child growth and development. Lower than might be expected requirements for special methods courses, other than the teaching of reading, seem to be a result of perceived necessity in many states to allow most methods to be dealt with in generic courses, without which many small college programs with limited faculty resources would be lost.

With reference to such national standards for the preparation and certification of teachers as NASTEC and NCATE, relatively infrequent requirements of multi-cultural education, study of the exceptional child, social foundations of education, and early (pre-student teaching) field experiences may be causes for concern. The most glaring inconsistencies are the infrequent requirements by state education agencies of multi-cultural education and preparation of regular teachers to work with exceptional children, contrasted with the central priority given both by current NCATE standards. Since both of these concerns have only recently reached the apparent pinnacle of NCATE's priorities for accreditation, it seems likely that the present situation is a result of the slowness of state educational bureaucracies to react to changing demands. Too, the demands have probably more often been pressed directly upon teacher education institutions than upon state education agencies.

Concentrations

A third component of the sequence in some states is the "area of concentration," "major," or some form of arts and science emphasis beyond the general education standards discussed earlier. Several states, of course, require an area of concentration within their already specified general education standards. These range from Alabama's requirement of an 18-semester-hour emphasis within a 60-hour general education requirement to California's requirement of four areas of emphasis, each with an 18 hour minimum, within an 82 semester hour general education requirement.

Eight remaining states require distinct arts and science majors or concentrations for elementary certificates. These range from Missouri's 21 semester hour concentration to Texas' 36 hour major, and include such complications as Arizona's combination of a 30 hour major or a combination of two concentrations of 18 and 12 hours.

DISCUSSION

Any effort to precisely interpret the composite of state certification standards is fraught with difficulties and potential for misunderstanding. It is necessary to note here two of these difficulties. First, it must be remembered that the several states which make some program or outcome specifications, while at the same time relying upon a program approval process, may well demand more than might be either explicit or implicit in their policy and guideline documents. However, since state approval is typically a result of negotiation between the state education agency and the college, it would not likely be possible to provide more precise data than that presented here. The qualifier which can be added is that there are instances where visiting committees representing the state would expect courses or instruction beyond what is suggested by the data shown.

Secondly, it should be recalled that this study presents minimum standards of the state education agencies and not the standards established by teacher education institutions in those states. Many institutions require more than their respective state minimums for graduation and/or certification. It is also true, however, as the authors pointed out in an earlier paper, that current budget difficulties and shrinking faculty resources in higher education are currently pressuring many institutions to step backward toward their state's minimum expectations, especially with regard to professional education requirements (Weible and Dumas, 1981).

This pressure to reduce professional requirements to state minimum standards is promoting major uncertainty among teacher educators. The pressure results in institutions moving away from the benchmarks for excellence established by NCATE and NASDTEC, while moving precisely in the direction recommended by the President's Commission on Excellence in Education. The Commission urges a reduction of professional coursework required and a corresponding increase in Arts and Science work.

The study reveals a startling diversity nationally as to which major component (general education vs. professional education) is likely to contribute most to development of the product everyone obviously wants--an excellent elementary school teacher. Some state agencies or boards are apparently convinced that a very minimal introduction to professional education, culminating in a supervised teaching experience, and a relatively massive general education component will produce the superior product. A substantial number of states reflect values quite the reverse, while most states fall in the middle ground, promoting more nearly a balance between the two components.

This diversity in point-of-view is a near perfect reflection of the conflict referred to earlier between NCATE's and NASDTEC's views of excellence in teacher education contrasted with those of the President's Commission on Excellence. This philosophical division is certain to provoke widespread re-examination of assumptions by both state agencies and teacher education institutions. The immediate result of such re-examination is almost certain to place greater weight upon the Commission statement and other similar reports such as the Carnegie Foundation's Assessment: High School and Beyond.

In light of such recommendations as those of the President's Commission, it is perhaps ironic that the most notable weaknesses of state standards in relation to such national guidelines as those of NASDTEC and NCATE fall unquestionably within the professional education component where, despite the unequivocal recommendations of one or both sets of national guidelines, a majority of states do not specify instruction in multicultural education, psychology or study of the exceptional child, community-parent relations, children's literature, and special methods in all curriculum areas other than reading. Early field experiences are also insisted upon by both NCATE and NASDTEC, yet required by only 10 states. Social foundations of education, a traditional aspect of teacher education sequences and one expected by both NCATE and NASDTEC, is not so firmly established as might be expected, being required by only 50% of the states.

Only NCATE suggests a minimum size for the general education component, one-third of the program or 40 semester hours. The vast majority of states exceed this, and all would do so if general education were combined with requirements for majors and areas of concentration. It will be recalled, however, that general education instruction is required by NASDTEC in all areas normally taught in elementary schools, including health. Health, in

combination with physical education, is required by less than half the states. Oral communication is also an expectation of NASDTEC, and only 50% of states require instruction or a demonstration of competency. Otherwise, 71% of the states with written specifications would appear to be in substantial compliance with general education expectations. There is, however, every reason to be concerned that there are some states where elementary teachers may be certified to teach subjects in a self-contained elementary classroom, having received no college instruction whatever in those subjects. However, the range and magnitude of failures of the states to comply with expectations for general education of the most relevant national standards is considerably less than with the professional education component.

The central dilemma which must constitute the "bottom line" of this report is that of arriving at the proper balance between professional training and general education or the liberal arts component. In light of the seemingly unresolvable conflict between some current school critics and the views of professional organizations as to what is needed for excellence in teacher preparation, there is substantial danger of the type of popular overreaction which has so frequently guaranteed that earlier reform efforts, such as that of the curriculum reform movement of the 1960's, would be short-lived and relatively ineffective in promoting real change. What seems necessary now is that state education agencies act, in concert with teacher education institutions, thoughtfully and moderately, but forcefully, in resolving this present dilemma. Whatever position a state or an institution should take regarding the essentials of excellence in the preparation of a teacher, it must be a position which will stand the test of time. The shared goal of excellence sought by both current critics and such professional organizations as NCATE and NASDTEC can only

be achieved by a long period of sustained effort directed toward some widely agreed upon objectives, a period such as the nation has not experienced in the past.

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